

DIVERSITY NEWS

January 2008

Yvonne: In November of 2007, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services sponsored the first “Federal Agencies Diversity Briefing” in Washington, D.C.

At that briefing, Dr. Roosevelt Thomas, author of “Beyond Race and Gender” and “Building on the Promise of Diversity” pointed out that, in his work as a diversity consultant, he has seen diversity efforts stall out because of conflicting agendas.

According to Dr. Thomas:

Some people think that the proper focus of diversity management is on addressing under-representation.

Others focus on understanding and valuing the diversity of the workforce they have.

Still others focus on developing their diverse workforce and removing barriers to their success.

And others focus on leveraging the diversity of their workforce—taking full advantage of what people have to offer—in order to meet the strategic goals and objectives of their organization.

Dr. Thomas pointed out that these points of view are not mutually exclusive or sequential in nature. It is possible, and desirable, to integrate these perspectives, with an emphasis on the last one: that is, leveraging diversity.

Thomas: In October of 2007, the Society for Human Resource Management held its annual Workplace Diversity Conference and Exposition.

At that event, Dr. Edward Hubbard, author of “The Diversity Scorecard,” spoke about measuring the results of diversity initiatives.

According to Dr. Hubbard, the ultimate goal of diversity management is to be able to utilize the skills and capabilities of each employee fully.

As Dr. Hubbard describes it, it is at this final stage... that is, leveraging a diverse workforce... when measures related to customer satisfaction, market segmentation, innovation, supplier diversity, and community relations take center stage.

“Diversity is not just about representation,” says Dr. Hubbard, “it’s about utilization”

The Department of Veterans Affairs has its own diversity measurement guru: Mike Dole, the director of workforce analysis and evaluation in the Office of Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity.

For this edition of Diversity News, we asked Mr. Dole to tell us about the most significant measures of diversity that he has been examining.

Mike Dole: There are five goals in the Department of Veterans Affairs' equal employment opportunity plan.

Goal 2, Grade Parity Issues, looks at whether there is a demographic bias in promotions, such as by race, ethnicity, gender, or disability.

Note that grade parity does not include the number of employees by race and gender compared to the Relevant Civilian Labor Force—that is addressed in Goal 1.

Today, I want to talk only about GS/GM employees, because Title 38 nurses use a different grade scale and Title 38 doctors are nearly all GS 15's, so there are few promotions. Similarly, the grades of blue collar employees are not comparable to GS/GM grades.

This bar graph shows the number of employees by race, ethnicity, and grade.

The largest number of employees is in grades 5 and 6 and the related single grade promotion interval occupations.

The next largest number is in the 7-9-11-12 double grade interval promotion occupations.

The smallest is the leadership pipeline of grades 13, 14, and 15.

Each of these needs to be examined separately.

As you can see, each of these groups has a different proportion by race and ethnicity, generally reflecting hiring patterns.

In this chart, the dark blue bars show the percent of each race, ethnicity, and gender group for the GS-3 to GS-12 single-grade interval promotion occupations, the ones that advance, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and so on.

The light blue bars show the percent of promotions for each of these groups in these occupations.

As you can see, in each pair, the two bars are essentially the same height.

This chart also compares onboard employees with promotion rates, but in this case covers the GS-7-9-11-12 double grade promotion interval occupations.

Note that the bars are once again nearly identical.

There are some tiny variations here.

One of the requirements of the EEO Plan is to look into any variations to determine if it indicates a barrier, or if there is some other neutral factor at work, such as years of experience.

This chart again compares onboard employees with promotion rates, but in this case covers the GS/GM leadership pipeline of grades 13, 14, and 15.

You can see that the bars are once again very close to identical. Note that, contrary to the expectations of many people, in these grades White men are promoted at a LOWER rate than expected. This is largely an age issue—many older people, such as myself, are maxed out in their series and are unlikely to change occupations or pay plans.

The reports for Title 38 nurses and wage grade occupations similarly show a close correlation between availability and promotions.

In short, there is no statistical trend of race, ethnicity, or gender having significant influence on promotions.

This does not exclude the possibility of bias in individual cases, but such cases would be an exception to the trend.

But what about targeted disabilities?

Looking at the three groups of occupations, single grade interval, double grade interval, and leadership pipeline, it appears that the rate of promotion for people with a targeted disability is somewhat lower than availability.

It may be that some individuals in custodial or other routine jobs have mental disabilities that would appropriately limit their competitiveness for higher graded positions. But I really don't see how a disability that had allowed an individual to reach grade 13 would appropriately limit them from grade 14.

The government average for targeted disabilities is about 1 percent of the workforce. VA is half-again better than that with 1.5 percent, and our goal is 2 percent. But these are still very small numbers and it is almost impossible to find statistical validity if these tiny numbers are broken out by location.

Nonetheless, the EEO plan asks that facilities review the promotions of those with targeted disabilities to see if there is a barrier.

The previous charts addressed promotions. This chart looks at occupation change.

We have a new online tool on VSSC that looks at how many people in GS grades 1 through 9 moved into a new occupation that has better prospects because of higher average grades.

Note that those upward mobility moves are proportionate to representation in the pool of grade 1 through 9 employees.

In short, there is no bias by race, ethnicity or gender in moving to occupations with better prospects.

At the other end of the grade scale, this chart shows the representation in the leadership pipeline. Grade 12 is shown also because that is the pool for promotions to GS-13. This is the right hand third of the first chart I showed you.

One of the most contentious issues in EEO is the observation that the leadership pipeline has a greater proportion of Whites than the other grade groups we looked at. Some people conclude that this difference reflects bias in the promotions. But we have just reviewed the evidence and seen that is not true. So what accounts for the difference?

Nearly everyone knows that there is about to be a lot of turnover as the Baby Boom generation starts to retire. What is not as well known is that this turnover will have a differential impact by race. Let's look at GS-15's.

It is obvious that White men are the predominate group in GS-15. But when you break out this grade by age, you see that most of these White men are age 50 and up, to the right of the vertical line on the graph, while the other groups are more evenly distributed.

The people to the right of the vertical line will be retiring in the next 10 to 15 years, which means that the proportion of the groups will become much more equal as shown on the left of the vertical line.

As noted earlier, age correlates with grade because, on average, older people have more experience and have had more chances to get promoted. Those who are 50 and up started work in the 1960s and 70s, drawn from a labor force that had quite a different make-up than it does today.

So to answer the question from the previous slide, the race and gender difference by grade is largely the result of who was in the labor pool 30 to 45 years ago.

As the older GS-15's retire, the grade will be made up of the younger GS-15's and whoever gets promoted from GS-14.

At GS-14, there is a similar pattern of Whites being the largest and the oldest group. As the older employees retire, the pool for promotion will be significantly more diverse. Note the increased representation of White women.

At first the older GS-14's may have the most experience and thus be very competitive for the promotions to GS-15. But it won't matter in the long run, because most will be retiring shortly anyway. In the long run the positions will be filled by people who are currently to the left of the vertical line.

And the vacancies left by those who are promoted or retire will be filled by GS-13's.

The EEO Plan calls for three major actions.

First, take a hard look at the correlation between promotions and availability at your facility. If promotions generally match availability, let people know that the system is working.

Second, if there are anomalies for groups or occupations, look into that in depth to determine if there is in fact a barrier. If so, figure out how to resolve it.

And third, review the promotion pattern for employees with a targeted disability to see if the disability is inappropriately delaying promotions.

And remember, if you are in a group that has a somewhat lower promotion rate, this doesn't necessarily mean that you are owed a promotion. Promotions should be only made on the merits of the individual.

Yvonne: That was interesting, wasn't it?

Thomas: Indeed.

My favorite part was when he said, "Over the next 10 to 15 years, these younger employees will be the pool for promotion into the leadership pipeline."

Yvonne: We're certainly looking forward to that!

And we're looking forward, as well, to having Mr. Dole back on a future edition of Diversity News, to talk more about measuring the success of diversity management.

But that's all the time we have for in this edition of Diversity News. We appreciate your watching, and we hope you'll tune in again next month.

Thomas: Until then, for more frequent updates of diversity news, sign up for our free weekly e-mail news service: NewsLink.

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Thomas: If you'd like to share YOUR story ideas, comments, or suggestions, please e-mail us at dmeeo@va.gov with the words "Diversity News" in the subject line.

We'd be delighted to hear from you.

Yvonne: Until next time...

Both: Have a great month!